

CLATSOP COUNTY - RICH IN HISTORIC RESOURCE

A Brief Report of Some Early Agriculture

Epics such as Captain Gray's naming the Columbia River in 1792 and fixing it as a U. S. Territory; the land exploration of Lewis & Clark and the establishment of Fort Clatsop, the first military post west of St. Louis; the start of a fur trading post in 1811, named for it's benefactor, John Jacob Astor; and the first permanent settlers coming farthest in the great push west, all hold fascinating details to stir the imagination and respect of those who follow.

Agriculturally, too, there are interesting events to recall and some of the early efforts locally to attain food and harness our oldest resource are listed here.

1795 - Only 3 years after Captain Gray's ship the "Columbia" entered the river, a Captain Bishop of the "Ruby" set his crew to planting garden on an island near Astoria. Peas, beans, potatoes, radishes, celery, mustard and cress were planted on a May day and later yielded a good crop of potatoes and some beans.

Indians of this area are reported to have worked the soil for small secluded patches of a wild tobacco prior to the white settlers.

1805-06 - This represents Lewis & Clark's famous winter when their military group lived mostly on deer, elk, some dog meat, Indian fare, and generally slim provisions. Their need for salt and efforts to get some whale blubber, also figure into our history.

The Salt Cairn at Seaside was an outpost of the group during most of the winter. Here they boiled sea water for a fair but tedious yield. The turnaround on the Prom at Seaside, marks the Western end of the Lewis & Clark Trail.

Beautiful Ecola State Park had its rugged beauty described by Lewis & Clark when they followed the Indian trails via outer Tillamook Head to a beached whale. The whale was stripped to the bones before they arrived; but Ecola, the Indian sound for whale, names the area.

1811 - John Jacob Astor's Pacific Fur Company came by land and also via the supply ship Tonquin to set up a fur trading post, now commemorated by the replica at 15th and Exchange. Stopping at the Sandwich Islands they took on 100 head of hogs, some goats, two sheep and a quantity of poultry. Some of these animals and fowl were washed overboard in route, but a pen of some 50 hogs reached their new home in Astoria, and milk from two goats was later reported.

The Astor party started gardening soon after arrival, and from twelve shriveled potatoes saved from the voyage came a yield of 190 potatoes, and five bushels were harvested the second year. It is said that gardens also included turnips - one measuring 33 inches around and weighing 15½ pounds.

In 1821 an inventory of the post (then in British hands) showed 1 bull, 8 cows, 15 heifers, 2 calves, 77 horses and 4 hogs. There was approximately 80 acres of land cleared at this time. Quite an array of buildings, shops, and an Indian trading post were all within a 200 yard square area protected by 15 foot stakes and cannons.

Prosperity of the post peaked in about 1825 when Hudson's Bay Company left it for Fort Vancouver. Layed to partial waste by Indians and re-posessed off and on by both American and British, Astoria had its next life as a seacoast town..

1837 - Dr. Elija White, came with a group of missionaries to Astoria and reported three buildings including a house for the agent in charge of the post, and two built of logs and enclosed by rail fences. In 1841 the post agent had a fair crop of potatoes in part of the fort clearing. In 1846 Astoria amounted to 10 houses including a warehouse, Indian lodges, a copper's and blacksmith's shop. It had no open ground except gardens within about a mile. It was described as the remains of an old settlement and the germ of a new one. About 30 white people and two lodges

of Indians lived in the area. A preemption right of the principal site was claimed by a man named Welch and the rest by John McClure. The first U. S. postal agent and customs collector west of the Rockies were assigned to the area.

The town grew into essentially two parts called McClure's Astoria and Adairville. It was said in 1950 that "a road between would have weakened the differences of both, isolation being the protection of either."

1840 - Clatsop Plains claims much agricultural development from about this time. Solomon Smith and his Indian wife Celiast (daughter of Clatsop Chief Coboway) are credited with the settlement and early development of Clatsop Plains. In 1840, Smith brought horses by boat from St. Helens to aid him in transporting supplies from the river to the plains. Solomon Smith and Rev. Frost brought a herd of cattle from Willamette valley via Tillamook and the beach to Clatsop Plains in 1841.

The Smiths made their first home on the old mission site presently marked on the Ridge road just south of Delaura Beach Road. By 1844 they had built a large house on their homestead. Their home became a mecca for new settlers. The Morrison family, for instance, stayed with the Smiths in 1845 until a homestead cabin was complete.

Smith is also credited in one report of starting a "ferry" across the Columbia by strapping two canoes together. He had probably the first dairy farm in the area. By 1849 he had a sizeable store in Skipanon; in 1851 a saw mill in Lewis & Clark valley; in 1852 resumed farming; and in 1874 was state senator. Solomon died in 1876, his wife in 1891. They are buried in the Pioneer Cemetery back of the Gray Memorial Church on Clatsop Plains.

1843-45 - During these years several more pioneer families took up land claims and started farming on Clatsop Plains. The wife of Tom Owens cut sod in squares with an axe to make a garden spot for a handful of flax seed brought from the "States". It produced enough for flossing two quilts and a ball of twine. The twine soon found superior use for fish nets by the Indians and replaced spun cedar bark. Mrs. Morrison is also reported to have raised flax on their farm. Potatoes were a major crop in these years as was wheat. One account tells of a bet by a young school teacher that he could dig 60 bushels in 10 hours. This took place in the Jewitt potato patch (a farm later belonging to Josiah West). Two or three hills filled the 1/2 bushel measure. The teacher collected all bets at the end of the day.

By 1845 wild cranberries from the Clatsop Plains area were bringing 10 to 12 dollars per barrel (100 pounds) in San Francisco - another cash crop for pioneer women (a good price, today, incidently).

A grist mill was built in 1845 on Ohanna Creek (Wahanna) by a group of early Clatsop Plains settlers, including Trask, Owens, Perry, Marlin and Tibbets.

In 1847 Tom Owens brought 60 head of "Spanish" cattle to the area, and with his wife's help broke 10 to milk the first year. Butter made on the farms sold for 50 cents to \$1.50 per pound. The year 1850 saw some 24 farms in the county with milk cows, hogs, sheep, oxen and horses all in use. Markets were likely being benefited by the California mining boom at this time.

A notable tie with this period was the recent recognition of the Tagg farm on the Plains as Clatsop's Centennial farm occupied from 1845 to date by members of the Morrison family -- now Mrs. Nancy Morrison Tagg.

These brief notes of history prior to Oregon becoming a state in 1859 have been taken from the Oregon Historical Society report of 1937, the book by Dr. Owens-Adair, and the recent book on Clatsop County by Emma Gene Miller. Your library has these plus many more, including "Astoria" by Washington Irving.

Encourage your family and centennial year company to visit such historical sites as Fort Clatsop, Astor Column, Fort Stevens (1865), Battery Russell, Peter Iredale wreck, Flavel Museum, Salt Cairn, Ecola Park, Fort Astoria, the Pioneer Cemetery on Clatsop Plains, and the once bustling seaports of Hammond and Warrenton.